

VZCZCXRO2144
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHSA #2543 3440702
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 100702Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0578
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 7418
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 1485
RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 9774
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 002543

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: ZUMA'S POPULARITY AT ALL-TIME HIGH

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) President Jacob Zuma is more popular than ever, according to a research survey conducted by TNS Research Surveys. (Note: TNS Surveys provides market research, global market research, and business analysis in hundreds of countries and claims to be the largest provider of customized research in South Africa. End Note.) Company spokesperson Neil Higgs noted, "Zuma's 100-day approval rating was 57 percent, dropping to 53 percent in September, but increasing to an all-time high of 58 in November." Higgs attributed the rise to Zuma's visit to Zimbabwe in August and the establishment of a task team to deal with issues in the neighboring country. Higgs also speculated that Zuma's increased popularity could be related to the nomination of a new chief justice and the launch of a presidential hotline.

¶2. (SBU) The survey was drawn from three studies conducted among a sample of 2,000 South African adults from seven of the major metropolitan areas of the country. The results showed that black South Africans were more approving of Zuma, with 75 percent agreeing with his leadership. Whites were described as "remarkably" positive about Zuma, but 32 percent were still unsure of his leadership. Higgs added, "The majority of Coloreds and Indians were described as 'fence-sitters,' also unsure of Zuma." Notably, Zuma at this point is more popular than former President Thabo Mbeki was when he was recalled in September 2008. Mbeki left with a rating of 34 percent.

¶3. (SBU) The African National Congress (ANC) on December 8 welcomed the survey's findings. The party released a statement that said, "Not only has President Zuma distinguished himself as a leader with the ANC's structures, he has been recognized as a peacemaker in Africa."

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Zuma's increased popularity rating comes a week after he was featured in a largely positive "Time" magazine article about his leadership. Many observers attribute his approval rating to his visit to Zimbabwe in August or to the launch of a presidential hotline to receive complaints about service delivery. So far, however, these actions are more style than substance since the SAG so far has only hinted at a different approach in its dealings with Zimbabwe's political leaders, and Zuma himself on December 2 described the hotline as "unable to handle the call load." However, at least for now, the popularity mark may put the ANC's alliance partners in a difficult position. High approval marks probably will make it more difficult for public criticism by the South African Communist Party or the Congress of South African Trade Unions to gain steam the way it did under Mbeki. END COMMENT.
GIPS